

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 TEGUCI 03044 262213Z
ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
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R 262133Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 750
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 3044

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SNAR
SUBJ: NARCOTICS SCANDAL: ARMED FORCES REPORT NO MILITARY INVOLVEMENT, WARN PRESS AND TURN MATTER OVER TO COURTS

REF: (A) TEGUCIGALPA 2922, (B) TEGUCIGALPA 1311

1. SUMMARY: ARMED FORCES COMMUNIQUE CLAIMS ITS INVESTIGATION SHOWED NO MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN NARCOTICS SCANDAL, WARNS PRESS TO REACT WITHIN PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND LEAVES FURTHER ACTION TO THE COURTS. IN A RADIO INTERVIEW THE MINISTER OF INFORMATION DENIED THE ARMED FORCES WERE DOING MORE THAN ASKING FOR PRESS TO BEHAVE RESPONSIBLY. WHETHER THIS ATTEMPT TO DOWNPLAY IMPORTANCE OF NARCOTICS SCANDAL SUCCEEDS OR NOT DEPENDS ON DEGREE OF PUBLIC REACTION, BUT THERE MAY BE LITTLE ALTERNATIVE TO ITS ULTIMATE ACCEPTANCE. END SUMMARY.

2. AN OFFICIAL COMMUNIQUE MADE PUBLIC ON 7 A.M. NEWS SATURDAY MORNING JUNE 24 (AND COMBINED WITH WORLD CUP FINALS THUS ASSURING LITTLE REACTION UNTIL AFTER WEEK-END) PROVIDED FIRST PUBLIC REPORT
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 TEGUCI 03044 262213Z

SINCE HIGH LEVEL COMMISSION NAMED TO INVESTIGATE ALLEGATIONS OF MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN FERRARI MURDER/NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING. COMMUNIQUE STATES:

--NAMES AND DETAILS OF INVESTIGATION WILL NOT BE MADE PUBLIC BECAUSE OF LEGAL REQUIREMENTS;
--NO OFFICER ON ACTIVE DUTY IS INVOLVED IN DRUG TRAFFICKING OR IN

THE FERRARI CASE OR IN THE OTHER CRIMES THE NATIONAL PRESS, MAKING UNRESTRICTED USE OF THE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION GUARANTEED BY THE ARMED FORCES REGIME, HAS DESCRIBED;

--ALL PERSONS INVOLVED IN THESE CRIMES HAVE NOW BEEN PLACED AT THE DISPOSITION OF THE COURTS;

--NEVERTHELESS, IN CARRYING OUT ITS INVESTIGATIONS, THE COMMISSION ESTABLISHED THAT SOME MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES MAY HAVE COMMITTED (PUDIERON HABER COMETIDO) IRRIGULARITIES IN CARRYING OUT THEIR DUTIES, BY COMMISSION OR OMISSION, AND ALTHOUGH IT IS DEFINITE THAT THESE ACTS ARE COMPLETELY UNINVOLVED WITH THOSE THAT HAVE HELD THE PUBLIC'S ATTENTION, THEY DO REQUIRE BEING ACTED UPON BY MILITARY JUSTICE;

--IT HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED THAT INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED AS THE AUTHORS, ACCOMPLICES AND ACCESSORIES OF THE CRIMES BEING INVESTIGATED HAVE TRIED THROUGH ECONOMIC AND OTHER MEANS TO CONFUSE PUBLIC OPINION AND TO PREJUDICE THE GOOD NAME OF THE ARMED FORCES.

3. THE COMMUNIQUE CLOSES WITH A WARNING TO THE PRESS AND TURNS FURTHER STEPS OVER TO THE COURTS: "FINALLY, THE ARMED FORCES WISH TO MAKE A PUBLIC CALL TO THE NATIONAL PRESS TO KEEP ITS ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE NORMS OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND THE PRESS LAW AND ARE CONFIDENT THE SITUATION WILL NOT ARISE IN WHICH IT WILL BE NECESSARY TO DETERMINE RESPONSIBILITY FOR TRANSGRESSIONS THAT MIGHT OCCUR TO DISCREDIT THE PRESTIGE OF OUR ARMED INSTITUTION AND THE HONDURAN NATION."

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 TEGUCI 03044 262213Z

"INVOKING THE NAME OF GOD AND THE (MILITARY) TRILOGY OF LOYALTY, HONOR AND SACRIFICE, WHICH GOVERNS OUR CONDUCT, WE SOLEMNLY STATE THAT WHICH IS HERE AFFIRMED IS THE STRICT TRUTH. IT REMAINS IN THE HANDS OF THE COURTS OF THE REPUBLIC THE CORRECT APPLICATION OF THE LAW."

4. MINISTER OF INFORMATION, LT.COL. O'CONNOR, INTERVIEWED ON THE RADIO DENIED THE PRESS WAS BEING THREATENED. HE DESCRIBED THE COMMUNIQUE AS A SIMPLE REQUEST FOR THE PRESS TO BEHAVE RESPONSIBLY, POINTING OUT (CORRECTLY) THAT ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS IT HAS PUBLISHED SENSATIONAL ITEMS THAT LATER TURN OUT TO REQUIRE CLARIFICATION OR RETRACTION. ONE NEWS COMMENTATOR ECHOED THIS THEME BY CLAIMING THE PRESS HAD BEEN USED BY VARIOUS GROUPS FOR DIVERSE ENDS.

5. COMMENT: THE COMMUNIQUE ATTEMPTS TO MAKE A MOLEHILL OUT OF THE MOUNTAIN OF SPECULATION AND CHARGES WHICH HAVE OCCUPIED PUBLIC ATTENTION SINCE LAST DECEMBER. IN DOING SO, IT ALMOST CERTAINLY REFLECTS A CONSCIOUS DECISION BY THE ARMED FORCES THAT ITS INTERESTS ARE BEST PROTECTED IN THIS ATTEMPT RATHER THAN BY PERMITTING THE PUBLIC CLEANSING ORIGINALLY PROMISED. THE ARMED FORCES HOPE PUBLIC ATTENTION WILL TURN ELSEWHERE, YET THIS CASE

HAS DEMONSTRATED REMARKABLE STAYING POWER. PRESS EDITORIALS AND COMMENTS BY PUBLIC FIGURES IN RECENT WEEKS HAVE EMPHASIZED THE NEED FOR A HEALTHY ARMED FORCES INSTITUTION AND REPEATEDLY SOUNDED THE THEME OF "ONE BAD APPLE DOES NOT RUIN THE BARREL," AS WELL AS NOTING THAT DAMAGE TO THE ARMED FORCES' PRESTIGE WILL ONLY BE TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF BY EXTREMISTS, A TACIT ADMISSION PERHPAS THAT POLITICS HAS BEEN PLAYED OVER THE ISSUE. WHETHER THE MINIMIZATION OF ALLEGED MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IS SUCCESSFUL DEPENDS ON THE STRENGTH OF PUBLIC REACTION AND WHETHER FURTHER INCRIMINATING DETAILS LEAK OUT.

6. IN SPITE OF COL. O'CONNOR'S DISCLAIMERS, THE ARMED FORCES HAVE MADE ANOTHER NO-SO-THINLY-VEILED THREAT (REF B) AGAINST THE PRESS. MILITARY OFFICERS, PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY, HAVE REACTED STRONGLY
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 TEGUCI 03044 262213Z

TO WHAT THEY VIEW AS PRESS SENSATIONALISM, IF NOT OUTRIGHT AND INTERESTED DISTORTION. AN EDITORIAL IN JUNE 23 TIEMPO OBLIQUELY REFERS TO THIS PROBLEM, EXPRESSING THE HOPE THAT MILITARY PATIENCE WITH CALLS FOR REFORM WILL NOT WEAR THIN AND BRING ABOUT PUNITIVE MEASURES AGAINST THE PRESS FOR DOING ITS JOB. THE TIEMPO EDITORIAL COULD BE BASED UPON INVORMATION SUCH MEASURES ARE BEING CONSIDERED, OR MIGHT SIMPLY REFLECT A COLD ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION. IT IS ANOTHER INDICATION OF THE PRESSURES THAT MIGHT HAVE CONVINCED THE ARMED FORCES THEY ARE BETTER OFF TRYING TO DE-FUSE THIS ISSUE.
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